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UNCLAS DUSHANBE 002028

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/CACEN, DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION NGO UNDER FIRE IN TAJIKISTAN

REF: DUSHANBE 00002012

1. Charge met with the American Bar Association/Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative (ABA/CEELI) on December 12 to discuss their ongoing struggle with the Tajik State-owned media. ABA/CEELI's "Street Law" program in Tajikistan's secondary schools (reftel) first came under fire in the press. The press inferred that ABA/CEELI is turning students against their teachers and parents with radical ideas. Now, the MFA is stating that ABA/CEELI's secondary school programs are no longer needed in Tajikistan.

2. Post continues to work with ABA/CEELI to reinforce the legal obligation of the Tajik State-owned newspaper "Jumhuriyat" to print their rebuttal letter to the negative article, published November 24. Under Tajik law, print media must publish a rebuttal letter within one month of the original article. "Jumhuriyat" has yet to publish Ambassador's "open letter" to their chief editor countering the original attack article against ABA/CEELI, though the Tajik local independent print media all published the letter in their weekly editions.

3. The diplomatic note to ABA/CEELI politely stated that the Tajik Ministry of Education implemented a series of secondary school programs, titled "Fundamentals of State and Law," and no longer needs ABA/CEELI to "duplicate" these themes with their "Street Law" program.

4. PAS learned that the Ministry of Justice is currently investigating several secondary partner schools and informing teachers that any who continue to work with international NGOs will be fired. ABA/CEELI is also undergoing a Ministry of Justice inspection of its charter to work in Tajikistan.

5. (SBU) COMMENT. Though mildly worded in typical Tajik MFA fashion, the diplomatic note is believed to be either a direct consequence of the "Jumhuriyat" attack article, or a companion move against ABA/CEELI's secondary school program in Tajikistan. The Ministry of Justice inspections are, unfortunately, a fact of life for NGOs operating in Tajikistan. International NGOs ride a roller coaster here in Tajikistan: sometimes relations with the government are high, and sometimes they suddenly plummet. ABA/CEELI is at that low point right now. Their strategy for now is to highlight their programs and successes. Post has requested a meeting with the Deputy Foreign Minister to raise this and other NGO issues. END COMMENT.
ARMBRUSTER

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